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ABSTRACT

Multicultural psychology examines existential-humanistic concerns in reference to the unique world of the client. Some of these contextual variables include race, age, religion, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, sociocultural and sociopolitical influences, as well as the roles of power, privilege, and disadvantage. Diversity impacts psychosocial development, interpersonal relations, academic performance, work productivity, freedom, meaning, life, and death. By knowing these interactions, psychologists can learn more about working with cultural sensitivities in the treatment process. The purpose of this program proposal is to develop an expanded model of multicultural humanistic psychology which illuminates human beings at the core of their being and at the core of their culture. (Contains 31 references.) (GCP)

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MULTICULTURAL HUMANISTIC PSYCHOLOGY

Empirical Investigations of Humanistic Concepts

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1. Focus of Program Proposal

According to Bugental (1978), psychologists who practice from a humanistic-existential perspective need to be keenly aware and understand that psychotherapy deals with the life and death of human potentialities. "Life is awareness and if no awareness exists or is likely to exist, then that is death" (Bugental, 1978). According to Frankl (1963), it is vital for people to find meaning in their lives. Meaning can be found in at least three different ways: by creating work or doing a deed, by experiencing or encountering, or by the attitude taken toward unavoidable suffering. Yalom (1980) states that confronting one's existential situation reminds one that paradigms are self-created barriers against the angst of fundamental uncertainty. The four ultimate concerns of life according to Yalom (1980) are death, isolation, meaninglessness, and freedom.

Multicultural psychology examines these existential-humanistic concerns in reference to the unique world of the client. Every person is as unique as a fingerprint. Some of these contextual variables include race, age, religion, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, sociocultural and sociopolitical influences, as well as the roles of power, privilege, and disadvantage. Diversity impacts psychosocial development, interpersonal relations, academic performance, work productivity, freedom, meaning, life, and death. By knowing these interactions,

we can learn more about working with cultural sensitivities in the treatment process (Jenkins, 1991).

The purpose of this program proposal is to develop an expanded model of multicultural humanistic psychology which illuminates human beings at the core of their being at the core of their culture.

2. Person within Culture

Yalom, for example, covers many perspectives on death. Cultural tradition may vary the experience of what death is or if there is more than one form of death. Being fully aware of death may promote radical personal change and can lessen dwelling on issues that are trivial in life. A second concern, freedom, comes at the cost of responsibility. Freedom and responsibility may mean different things to people of differing cultures and backgrounds. Meaninglessness, according to Yalom, is knowing that life is at times absurd, unjust, and without built-in meaning. Isolation deals with the fact that no matter how close a person gets to others, they ultimately still must face life and death alone.

In reaching for a multicultural understanding of these concepts, in this program proposal, we can find a richer understanding of the human experience.

3. Subjects and Procedure

The purpose of this program proposal is to examine the differences in the experiences of diversity from a multicultural/humanistic perspective. The recently released (2001) The Handbook of Humanistic Psychology contains two relevant chapters that will be incorporated:

1. **Humanistic Psychology and Multiculturalism: A Review and Reflection, by Adelbert H. Jenkins**
2. **Existential Cross-Cultural Counseling: When Hearts and Cultures Share, by Clemmont Vontress and Lawrence Epp**

This program proposal avoids using a dominant population as the norm and seeks to present research findings that cut across diverse populations. Initially, seven individuals were selected for multicultural diversity. More and different populations will be added. The subjects involved in this project were given the opportunity to answer four questions and to relive and evaluate critical experiences in their lives. Each prospective participant understood that the project was not individual therapy and that the identity of each would be confidential. All potential subjects agreed to participate in the project. The seven initial participants:

1. **Italian American male, 73 years old, married**
2. **African American female, 30 years old, single**
3. **Italian American female, 50 years old, married**
4. **Appalachian Caucasian female, 35 years old, married**
5. **Mexican American male, 50 years old, married**
6. **New Zealand Caucasian male, 38 years old, married**
7. **Native American male (reservation), 45 years old, separated**

Initial participation selection was not meant to be inclusive but representative of diversity. Additional populations, such as Asian Americans, will be included.

Upon agreement of participation, each person was asked a series of four questions in the following order:

1. Describe a time when you felt total freedom.
2. Describe a time when you felt total isolation.
3. Describe a time when you felt total meaninglessness.
4. Describe a time when you felt closest to death.

The preceding order was selected to help ease each person into the process of the interview questions. All were told that they could stop the interview at any time if they were not comfortable. All participants completed the interview process.

4. Results and Implications

At the time of this program proposal, seven interviews have recently been completed, resulting in a collection of narratives. More interviews with additional populations are scheduled.

The next step will employ a qualitative narrative research method to allow for the emergence of themes and process variables (Lieblich, 1998). Content themes will be identified and outlined, with examples of each. The identification of process variables will help illuminate and highlight the wisdom recorded from the lives of the participants.

Implications for cross-cultural understanding and counseling with diverse clientele will focus on the major headings of freedom, isolation, meaninglessness, and death.

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